

Old State House
Hartford, Connecticut
Hartford Co.

HABS No. 3-3

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District #3

Historic American Buildings Survey
Harold H. Davis, District Officer
29 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

The Old State House in Hartford, Connecticut, was decided on by the legislature in 1792, and occupied in 1796. It was designed by the noted architect, Charles Bulfinch. The only positive proof that Bulfinch was the architect is contained in a letter dated September 30, 1792, from John Trumbull, the artist, to Oliver Wolcott, who was then comptroller of the United States Treasury.

The original allotment of 1500 pounds by the state proved insufficient, and permission to raise money by lottery came to nothing. Jeremiah Halsey, of Norwich, Connecticut, and Andrew Ward, of Guilford, made a contract to build the State House secured by a tract of land known as the "Gore Lands", but the title of the state to these lands proved imperfect. These two gentlemen had expended \$35,000 on the building and finally accepted some years later from the legislature, \$20,000 in part payment of their claim. The total cost of the building was \$52,480.

It appears that Bulfinch had an unsatisfactory time in dealing with the City of Hartford and there is a tradition that the necessities of the hour cramped the design of the building. The present balustrade on the roof was not erected until 1815, and the cupola, copied from the old City Hall in New York, was not added until 1822.

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The interior contained a beautiful spiral stair case in the great hall and the porticos with their high arches at either front, were outlined with graceful iron work. All of this was lost in the restoration of 1878-1879 when the City of Hartford took over the building to house its various departments. A third floor was added in between the high second floor rooms. In 1918, when the final restoration took place, this extra floor was removed and the entire building made fireproof, ~~that is, the floors, ceilings, etc.,~~ and steel trusses added for support of roof.

The two large second floor rooms (Council Chamber and House of Representatives) are undoubtedly now little changed from their original designs. The first floor, Supreme Court Room was restored, apparently without sufficient knowledge of the original detail. The Governor's and Committee Rooms (first floor) are devoid of architecture, and, at present, are used for Americanization classes. The hall and stairs are (from all the information available) not in strict accord with the original Bulfinch design.

Five Presidents: Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Johnson and Grant have visited this building. In this building in 1814, was held the famous Hartford Convention which occasioned great excitement and much comment throughout the country. Here also, the Convention met in 1818, which framed the present Constitution of the State of

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Connecticut.

General Lafayette was tendered a public reception here when making his last visit to this country in 1825. Marshall Foch of France, when touring this country at the end of the World War, was received at the Old State House.

For over two hundred and seventy years, the history of State House Square has been intimately connected with the history of Hartford and the State of Connecticut. The land was a part of the first purchase made by the English within the present limits of Connecticut and was deeded by Sequassen, sachem of the "Tunxis" or Hartford Indians, to Samuel Stone and others in behalf of the inhabitants of Hartford. This title of the land was conferred by another Indian deed, dated July 16, 1670, being the first deed recorded in the Hartford Town Records.

In the year 1865 the Colony of Connecticut conveyed to the town of Hartford, all rights and titles to State House Square and certain other lands owner and possessed by the Colony by virtue of the Charter (granted by King Charles II in 1662). The town remained undisputed owner of the square until in 1872, when that portion lying east of this building was conveyed to the City of Hartford, and by the city deeded to the United States for government uses. The remaining interest in

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in the square and the buildings was conveyed to the City of Hartford in December, 1878. Now that the demolition of the federal building is practically completed, may this building and square be long preserved as a memento of former generations.

Sources: Pamphlets published by the "Connecticut State Library" and "The Hartford Courant".

Compiled by Warner A. Ebbets

Approved: *Harold H. Davis*

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

Addendum to
Old State House (Connecticut Statehouse)
Main St. & Central Row
Hartford
Hartford County
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-3

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240